

Nora Bailey Interview
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DC: I generally start out with really basic questions. You've already answered it, I think. Where were you born?

NB: Pontiac.

DC: In Pontiac, OK.

NB: Uh-huh.

DC: And, let's see, if you don't mind me asking, when was that?

NB: December 4, 1942.

DC: OK. Right in the middle of the war there.

NB: Yes. Yes.

DC: Now, I think you answered this partly before we started, as well, but I'll get back to it. Were your parents from Pontiac?

NB: No, they were from the extreme western part of Kentucky.

DC: Both of them?

NB: Yes.

DC: OK.

NB: Uh-huh.

DC: And what did they do? What did their families do there?

NB: Most of them farmed. You know, my grandfather was a barber. And my other—my other grandfather, he'd gotten killed down there. Somebody killed him.

DC: Oh, really? He was murdered.

NB: Yes. Yes, he was. And that—he was only, like, in his thirties. And he had gone up to work at—oh, I can't think of this—the site where he—it was for military down there. And

he was—helped building, you know, the places where the guys would sleep. You know, like the barracks and stuff. And he'd gotten hit over the head and his wallet was taken. And somebody had killed him, and they never did find out who did it.

DC: Oh, goodness. He was helping build the . . .

NB: The barracks. Yes. Uh-huh. Yeah.

DC: Oh my. Would this be your Father's Father or your Mother's . . .

NB: Yes. [Father's]

DC: How old was your Father when this happened?

NB: Oh, my goodness. I would probably—I'd probably state, you know, maybe forty-something, I don't know. Maybe not. I don't know. I don't know.

DC: OK. You said your grandfather was only in his thirties when he was killed?

NB: Yes. Well, my Dad was small then. Yes, he was small.

DC: Yeah, he would've been small.

NB: Uh-huh. He was a small child at that time when that happened. But my Dad remembered it, though. Yes.

DC: Wow. So how did they all make their way then to Pontiac?

NB: They made their way up here to get a good job.

DC: Do you know when that was?

NB: Oh my goodness. [pause] Probably, I would think, maybe 1940. About that. I know he only had a couple of years in to Truck and Coach when I was born. Yeah.

DC: OK. Truck and Coach. Were they married in Kentucky—your parents?

NB: Yes.

DC: OK.

NB: Yes.

DC: And then so they came to Pontiac as a couple, it sounds like.

NB: Yes. Uh-huh.

- DC: OK, yeah. Do you know where they lived at that point in time?
- NB: They lived down in Pontiac off of Huron Street. It used to—the place used to be called Arcadia Court. And it was quite a few apartments and they were small apartments. And that's where I was born.
- DC: Where you were born, OK.
- NB: Uh-huh.
- DC: Did you ever travel back to Kentucky?
- NB: Yes, we did numerous times. Mm-hmm.
- DC: So you had relatives who stayed in Kentucky?
- NB: Yes, uh-huh. Yes.
- DC: Well what do you remember about growing up in Pontiac?
- NB: Oh my goodness. Just really, you know, going to school. Going to school and—we lived in Pontiac until I was about fifteen, sixteen years old. And then we moved out to Waterford. My Mom and Dad bought a home and we moved out there. And then I graduated from Waterford Township High in 1960.
- DC: OK. Well tell me more about—did you stay in those apartments, then, until you moved to Waterford?
- NB: No, we moved one other time. We lived in a house in Pontiac off of Rae—on Raeburn Street. Uh-huh.
- DC: OK. So you said you remember the schools. What schools did you go to in Pontiac?
- NB: Well, I went to Central School, which—and then I went on to Eastern Junior High. And then I went a year to Pontiac Central. And then finished the last two in Waterford.
- DC: OK. So what was your neighborhood like? I mean, what—were most of the people from Pontiac? Or had people moved in at this point in time?
- NB: Yeah, I think a lot of people were from the Pontiac area.
- DC: Yeah?
- NB: Uh-huh. Yeah. I don't really know—remember a lot of the backgrounds of the people because, you know, when I was born there in Arcadia Court, you know, I

just—I was so young and everything. So, and—but I think most of the people generally were from around this area. But . . .

DC: OK. Then you would've started school after the war was over. So what kinds of things did you do in school? What kinds of things did you get involved in?

NB: Well, I didn't do too much, like in grade school and junior high. But once I got into high school, I was in quite a few clubs and I was a majorette with the band. I did that.

DC: What clubs were you in?

NB: Oh, oh my goodness.

DC: Didn't expect to talk about this, huh?

NB: Oh, no, no. Oh my goodness. That's—that was a long time ago.

DC: But you were a majorette, you said?

NB: Yes, I was a majorette. Yes.

DC: Yeah. Did you have brothers and sisters?

NB: One brother older than me.

DC: OK. Was he born in Kentucky?

NB: Yes, he was. Uh-huh. Yeah.

DC: All right. Let's see. What kinds of things did you do as a family when you were growing up? Did your—let me back up. Did your Father continue working at Truck and Coach then?

NB: Absolutely.

DC: He did, OK.

NB: Yes. Yes. Oh, we—I don't know. We went on picnics and stuff like that. You know, always went to my grandmother's house in Pontiac for Christmas.

DC: So your grandmother moved up from Kentucky, as well?

NB: Yeah, a long time ago. Yes. Yes, she did.

DC: OK. Did she move around the same time as your parents?

NB: Yeah, pretty much around the same time. And she finally got a job at Pontiac General Hospital. And she worked there until she retired. Yeah.

DC: OK. So what did she do at Pontiac General?

NB: She was in dietician. She's a dietician.

DC: OK. And did your Mother work outside the home at all?

NB: She worked a little while at Pontiac Motors.

DC: When was that?

NB: Oh, my goodness.

DC: Were you a child or were . . .

NB: Yeah, I was—I was just about becoming a teenager.

DC: OK.

NB: And she worked maybe about three or four years, and then got laid off and then decided not to go back. She wanted to raise me and, you know, I wanted her at home.

DC: What was her job at Pontiac Motors? Do you know?

NB: I have—I don't remember. No.

DC: Don't remember. OK. Yeah.

NB: I don't—I don't have a clue on that. But she did work there.

DC: OK. And what was your Dad's job at Truck and Coach?

NB: He was—he was in stock. Uh-huh. He was—I don't know—a head man in stock. Not a foreman or anything, but like a group leader. That's what it was. A group leader in stock. And that's pretty much what he did, you know, during his whole time. Always worked nights.

DC: Oh, he worked nights, OK.

NB: Yes. Always.

DC: So did you get to see him much?

NB: Not very much. I mean, you know, because I was in—I was going to school and

then when I got home, you know, he was leaving for work. And he did a lot of overtime and stuff, too, so yeah.

DC: OK. So let's see, for probably, what, your first twelve or thirteen years you said your Mother stayed at home. So he probably had to work a lot of overtime just to keep things going.

NB: Yes. Uh-huh.

DC: Let's see. Was he a member of the union at Truck and Coach?

NB: Oh yes. Yes.

DC: Yeah? Did he talk about that at all?

NB: Hmm. I know we used to go as a child to the union parties that they had in the summertime. And I can remember, you know, going and—they would take just piles and piles of sand and then they would put pennies and nickels and quarters and stuff in. And you'd go, and you'd run and try to, you know, get as much money as you could out of that. So that was one of the memories I had of that, you know? I must have been, maybe, seven, eight, nine years old, something like that. [laughs]

DC: Sure. Yeah, it was big money in there.

NB: Yeah, it was back then! Because I think my Dad told me when he first started at Truck and Coach, he made, like, about sixty cents an hour. Of course, back then, that was quite a bit of money. It's hard to believe, but . . .

DC: Do you know if he ever thought about going back to Kentucky?

NB: *No.*

DC: No?

NB: No. Uh-uh. Because you couldn't make a living down there. These were small little towns and, you know, you just couldn't make a living. So that's—that's why he came up here, you know?

DC: Did you think your parents liked Pontiac?

NB: Yeah. It was a really nice town and everything then. You know, kind of a booming town and—because, you know, we had like—we had Truck and Coach and Fisher Body and Pontiac Motors and, you know, so it was a good town.

DC: What kinds of friends did you have back in school? I mean, like, were they friends from school or from church or, you know . . .

- NB: I had a lot of—I used to go to church, the First Baptist Church down in Pontiac. And I had—I had a few friends from there, but mainly school. And I was in a majorette corps, too, and I had a lot of girlfriends from that. And we would travel and, you know, I would twirl baton in a contest with the corps and I would also twirl baton in contests by myself. So, you know, I *really* enjoyed that. Really enjoyed that.
- DC: Wow. Yeah. How did you get interested in that?
- NB: Oh, I don't know, we—I think we went to a parade or something and I seen these girls. I said, “Oh, Mom, that's what I'd like to do. I'd like to do that.” So we just started looking into it and everything and I got into this corps. Majorette corps. And I really, really enjoyed that. So that's what started me, you know, into being a majorette with the band and, you know, that kind of thing.
- DC: Yeah. What kinds of chores did you have around the house and stuff like that growing up?
- NB: Oh my goodness, I made my own bed, took care of my own room. And then when my Mom was working at Pontiac Motors I tried to iron—I tried to help her out. And, you know, help her out with the chores around the house, because she was working. So . . .
- DC: How about your brother? What kinds of things did he have to do?
- NB: Well, there was about nine years difference in my brother and I. We—you know, there was quite a few years.
- DC: I didn't realize there was that big a gap.
- NB: Yeah, there was a big gap there. So, but you know—I mean he was nine years old—I mean, by the time I got up there, he was already out of the house. You know, so . . .
- DC: Yeah. Where did he go?
- NB: Let's see, what *did* he do? He worked at a meat market down in Pontiac. That's what he did. And then he—then finally he got a job at Truck and Coach and then he decided to quit that job and go to Florida.
- DC: Oh really?
- NB: Yeah, he wanted to go down there and live, because his wife was—his wife's parents lived there and he just wanted to go down there to see how he could, you know, make a living. And he did pretty good.
- DC: What did he do down there?
- NB: He worked in wrought iron. He had his own business. And so, you know, he did good.
- DC: OK. So he left—left sunny Pontiac for Florida.

NB: [laughs]

DC: Did you have any jobs outside the home when you were growing up?

NB: Mainly just babysitting. I did a lot of that.

DC: Mostly for neighbor kids and stuff?

NB: Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah, I did a lot of that.

DC: OK. So what about—let's see, you said you graduated from—well, what was it like moving out to Waterford Township? You said you moved out there.

NB: I loved it.

DC: Yeah?

NB: I loved it.

DC: Did you lose track of friends or anything?

NB: Um, yeah, a little bit. Yeah, because you know, when you're young, you know, you go to a new school and then you meet new ones. And then, of course, I got in with the band and I was a majorette. I loved Waterford Township High School. I just loved it, but I only had a chance to go there two years.

DC: Was it different from the Pontiac high school you went to?

NB: Yeah, I thought so.

DC: How so?

NB: I—I think the people were a lot friendlier out there, you know, and I just—I just enjoyed going to school there. In fact, that was the only high school that we had in Waterford at the time and we had so many seniors that year, 1960, that they—it was like 469 seniors. That's it. And then we had, you know, the sophomores and juniors, as well, in the school. And so what they did was, they split us up, our senior class. Some went in the mornings and some went in the afternoons. And that's—that's how we had to go to school that year.

DC: So you could all fit in there.

NB: Yeah, so we would all fit in there. And that worked out pretty good, you know? But then we all graduated together, so.

DC: What kind of a house did you move into out there?

NB: Oh, a really nice ranch type. Brick. Really nice house. Well, at the time, you know, all brand-new. Brand-new home with a garage and everything, and I think it only cost like about \$14,500. And, I mean, that included the property. It was in a nice subdivision off M-59, and it was about a half a mile from the high school. So, you know—yeah, it was really nice out there.

DC: Were your parents eager to move out to Waterford? What motivated them to go to Waterford?

NB: Well they just—they just really wanted to go out there. Different area, you know, and I think it—I think it was a little safer area to move. Yeah. So, I don't know, I just—I really enjoyed it. The only thing I didn't like was having to walk to school.

DC: How far did you have to walk?

NB: Well, it was over a half a mile and we had—down M-59, no sidewalks. And, I mean, my Dad complained to the school district. He said, “You know, we're paying these taxes here and my child has to walk to school in the cold.” You know? So there were times when he'd take me into school. My Mom didn't drive, so.

DC: Did she ever learn to drive?

NB: No.

DC: OK.

NB: No, uh-uh. So, I mean, you know, it was really hard traipsing through all that snow on the shoulder of the road.

DC: Mm-hmm. Sounds dangerous.

NB: Yeah, it was. And I mean, school buses were passing us right up. And that's what my Dad couldn't understand. You know, school bus passing up the kids, but if you lived a half a mile from the school, you had to walk. So my Dad was quite upset with that. You know, yeah.

DC: Yeah. Daughter was in danger.

NB: Yeah.

DC: I've talked with a number of workers who said that 1958 was a really tough year, and it seems like you would have moved to Waterford just before then. You know, if you were fifteen or sixteen, it would have been 1957 or '58 when you moved out there.

NB: Uh-huh.

DC: Do you ever remember your Dad being laid off or anything like that at that time?

- NB: No, I don't. I don't remember my Dad ever getting laid off. I don't ever remember that. No, I don't.
- DC: Maybe it didn't affect him. I was just curious because a lot of people said that they were laid off for long periods of time. It seems like that's something you would've remembered if you had just moved into a house.
- NB: Yeah. In fact, it could've happened—that could've been the time it happened to my mom. She might've got laid off from Pontiac Motors. Because I know she did get laid off at one time. And she was off, like, I don't know, maybe three, four, five months. And then she decided not to go back when they called her back, because she wanted to be at home with me, you know. Because I was a teenager and, you know, I wasn't a bad teenager or anything, but she—you know, I said, "Mom, stay home." You know, and so she decided to do that.
- DC: OK. Yeah.
- NB: Yeah.
- DC: And so what did you do when you graduated from high school?
- NB: Well, I started—I went to Pontiac Business Institute down in Pontiac. And I went there for about a year and got—graduated from there. And I went out to Truck and Coach to try to get a job in with the office, you know, part of General Motors. And I mean, you know, I'm going in and I'm trying to get a job and I'm like eighteen years old and they wouldn't hire me at the time because I didn't have enough experience. And that just kind of—that devastated me because I—I seen my Dad work at General Motors and we didn't lack anything, really, you know. We had food on the table, a place to live, and you know, we didn't lack anything. And I thought, you know, that's what I want to do. I want to work at General Motors. So, I mean, I tried and tried and I didn't get in. So then I got a job at—at Division Printing. It was right on M-59. I don't think it's there anymore.
- DC: Let me back up for a second.
- NB: OK.
- DC: Tell me about the course at the Pontiac Business Institute. How long was that course?
- NB: Well, I took—let's see, I took comptometer and . . .
- DC: What's comptometer?
- NB: See, you've never heard?
- DC: Yeah, yeah.

NB: It was like an adding machine. I mean, it was a machine maybe a little bit bigger than that telephone and it had numbers on it. And, you know, you could—I could just set and look at a paper and I could do this, you know, because I got really good at it. And I mean that was the going *machine* back then, you know. And, you know, I passed that class and then I went into speed writing, which I *really* didn't like.

DC: Why is that?

NB: I don't know. I just really wasn't kind of interested in that. But I took it anyway. And, let's see, was there another?—I think I just took two classes, if I'm not mistaken.

DC: How long did that take?

NB: Took me—it took me about a year. Yeah, took me about a year. And I had worked part-time for Kirby Vacuums on Dixie Highway. I had worked part-time there in the evening.

DC: Was this before you graduated or after?

NB: After.

DC: After, OK.

NB: After.

DC: What did you do for Kirby?

NB: I worked in the office.

DC: OK.

NB: And I worked there—I worked there, I don't know, maybe a couple of years and I got out of that. That's when I went over to Division Printing to full-time.

DC: OK. So it sounds like you were working at Kirby while you were also taking your courses?

NB: Yes. Uh-huh.

DC: All right. And when you said you were working in the office at Kirby, what did you do?

NB: Oh, I was doing filing, you know, and answering the phone and, you know, putting kits together for the men that come in to take the classes for salesman. You know, they had kits to be given out when they graduated, you know. They went through a course like for a week or two, and the day that they graduated or the day before, I'd make up their kits for them, you know, to go out as being salesmen.

DC: Did you ever want to be in sales?

NB: No. No. I still wanted that job at General Motors.

DC: Were you going on a regular basis, then, to apply, or to ask about jobs, at General Motors?

NB: Well, what had happened was when I started working at Division Printing, I made ninety cents an hour. And then after three months I got a ten-cent raise. And then if you missed any time through the week, any overtime, you know, you wouldn't get—you know, like time and a half or anything. You had to work a full forty hours before you got time and a half. But I worked there almost seven years. Yeah. Because I'm still trying to get into GM, though. And my Dad had a friend in the union and I went and I talked to him. And I can't really—I think his name was Woody, but I'm not sure. That was quite awhile back. But I talked to him and said, you know, "I put my application in at General Motors Parts Division out on Williams Lake Road in Waterford and I'm still trying to get in." And he says, "Well, you know, I'll see what I can do," you know, and everything. But during that time I was working at Division Printing, every, every day I would go in after I worked at Division Printing and sign my name in at, you know, General Motors Parts Division.

DC: Every day.

NB: *Every day.* And, you know, I'd go in, sign my name, my telephone number. And they'd say, "You here again?" I says, "I'm going to keep coming in here till you give me a job."

DC: Wow. That's determination.

NB: Every day I went in. For how long, I don't know. But I used to go home, you know, for lunch when I worked at the printing company. And I went home that day and left and went back to work and my boss had come up and said, "Well you know, you've got a telephone call from home." And, you know, it kind of made me nervous, you know, so I called my Mom. And she said [almost whispering], "General Motors called you. They want you to come in."

DC: Wow. And what year was this?

NB: Oh, 1969.

DC: OK. All right.

NB: Yeah. And so I had to try to, you know, make an excuse, you know, to leave to go home. And I went home, cleaned up, and went in. I got the job.

DC: What job was it?

NB: I was working—it was called unitizing.

DC: What was unitizing?

NB: Unitizing is where you—you get parts and stuff from different corporations, you know, and different companies. And they'd bring them in and what we did, we'd make kits for the different parts of the car. You know, if it was like nuts and screws and bolts and gaskets and stuff like that, we would put these kits together. So I left Division Printing, you know. I told them that I—I went in and told them, I quit and that I had a job at GM. And I felt so proud. [laughs] I was so happy. I was. And so I went—I left Division Printing making \$2.47 an hour after almost seven years to about, I think it was \$3.00--\$3.70-something an hour at General Motors. And I mean, I was just so pleased, you know, and so happy.

DC: Yeah. That's a big bump.

NB: Back then it was. I mean, I didn't even get a full week in and I looked at my check and I mean, I was just ecstatic. I mean, you know, I was just so happy.

DC: Where were you living at that time?

NB: OK, let me see. I was—I was still living at home. Because I never, I never made enough money to go out and make a living on myself. I was—I was about twenty-six years old then. And I mean, I couldn't make, you know, any money working for \$2.47 an hour. I mean, you know, I had a car payment and I could never afford a house payment or rent or anything like that. But once I started working at GM and everything, that's when I went out and I found a little house and I got out on my own then.

DC: Wow. That's a good story.

NB: Yeah. [laughs]

DC: Let's see. What about the classmates that you graduated with in high school? Had any of them gotten work at General Motors, or what were they doing? What were your friends doing at that time?

NB: Well, a lot of those people went to college, you know. And I never really—there was a few people that I kept in touch with. But you know, most of the time when you get out of high school, you know, the kids, they go here and there and some go in the service, some go to college, you know, and so you kind of lose track of people.

DC: Yeah, I was just wondering if you'd seen others in your grade get jobs at General Motors.

NB: Well, they could have but I didn't really see, I don't think, anybody that got into the Parts Divisions of General Motors. You know, so, yeah.

DC: Yeah. So it sounds like maybe truly jobs weren't available. I wasn't sure if others had gotten jobs and you didn't and you could explain it or what.

NB: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. Did you like the unitizing job?

NB: [quietly but sincerely] Mm-hmm.

DC: Mm-hmm. What was it that you liked about it?

NB: It was just, I mean—we would set on a machine with a conveyor belt, you know, that went by, and you could just drop pieces in there. And what I couldn't understand was that when we run out of pieces, we'd just stop and set there. I mean, it would have never happened at the printing company, you know, that I worked at. I mean, that—it wasn't unionized, either. And another story I have to tell you about the printing company, maybe about a year before I left there, we tried to get the UAW in there.

DC: You did, OK.

NB: And I mean, I—they had come in and there was supposed to be a vote. And I was on the UAW side as people cast their votes. And you know, that was pretty hard to do, you know, because I mean, you know, these small companies, they didn't want to be unionized. Come on, you know, they didn't want to be unionized.

DC: How many people worked there?

NB: Oh, I'd say maybe about fifty or sixty. But, you know, I thought, "Well, am I going to lose my job from doing this?" You know, because I still hadn't got my job at GM. But that's sort of how I met this fellow named Woody, too. Because I forgot about that, but that's how I met him. And my Dad knew him, too. But anyway, you know, I was on the union side when the ballots were cast. And it was like an even score. That's how close to become unionized, that company. But it finally did become unionized.

DC: While you were still there?

NB: No, after I left. After I left. Later, maybe a few years later. Uh-huh.

DC: Tell me what was going on there that made you want a union.

NB: Just being kind of walked all over. I mean, no rights. I mean, you know, not getting enough money. Having to work a full forty hours until—you couldn't get, you know, like time and a half or extra time for overtime. Just the way you were treated in general. You know, it—oh, the boss's sister had come in to be a foreman there and oh, she was—oh, she was so mean. Oh my goodness gracious. Oh! And you know, what was so funny was that I got called to the office. Because I mean, you know, I'm a union person without ever being unionized [laughs] you know, until I started working at GM. And she called me to the office and she said, "Well, you know"—I'm not a mean person, either, but she says, "What's this I hear about you not liking me?" That's what she said. And I says, "You know what, lady, nobody likes you." [laughs]

DC: What exactly was she doing?

NB: Oh well, you know, we had a long, long table. And we used to make the GM—we printed out the GM books that come with the cars, the owner manuals. And there used to be five or six of the owner manuals right on one big sheet of paper. And what we had to do sometimes, we had to walk around in a big circle creating these books. You know, you go with the inner part and just keep adding and adding till you come to the cover. And then she would—we weren't going fast enough. I mean, you know, you do this constantly all day. So I just, I thought, "I'm going to get smart. I'm going to learn how to staple these books." So I started stapling them, you know, to keep—if you weren't going fast enough, she'd get behind you and she'd go and hit you.

DC: Really?!

NB: I mean, with the paperwork as you're going along. Oh, she was a witch, I'm not kidding you. [laughs]

DC: Do you have any idea what kind of background she had?

NB: I have no idea. [laughing]

DC: Other than being the boss's sister?

NB: Just the boss's sister—that's it!

DC: Wow, that sounds like the olden days.

NB: It was. It was.

DC: Was she older or younger?

NB: Yeah, older. Older. Yeah, but I mean, I never—I didn't get fired or anything for that, for telling her that. I mean, I told her what I thought. I sure did.

DC: Wow. Was it a family operation?

NB: Yes, sort of. I mean, you know, just—I don't think there were—I think his son finally, you know, got to the age and he came in and worked. He was fine. But it's just—I mean, I worked there, like I said, almost seven years, because I needed the job. I didn't like it there. I was so proud to walk in there and say, "I quit. I've got a job at GM." You know, I was just so proud. You know, I was happy.

DC: Yeah. Had you looked anywhere else besides General Motors for a job?

NB: Not really. Not really. That's what my goal was, to go there and work. Uh-huh.

DC: Did you print other things besides the owner's manual?

NB: Oh yeah, we did other stuff.

DC: What kinds of stuff?

NB: Oh, you know, business sheets and stuff like that for different companies. And they would be cut into a big machine, a big cutter. I can remember that cutter and a guy, you know, would pick up these big pieces, I mean like this, of paper and put it in there. And I mean that blade would come down. Oh, it always scared me seeing Richard cutting that stuff. But, you know, he was good. He never cut off a finger or anything. He was good at it.

DC: Were there any who did have accidents?

NB: I never seen it—I did one time. I had an accident on the staple machine.

DC: Ooh. What happened?

NB: I stapled my finger. [laughs]

DC: That sounds painful.

NB: But, you know, you'd pick up the book and you'd put it on this thing and then you would get the book even and then you'd go along and you'd be putting ten staples in. And I mean, I got good. I got fast. And just one time it slipped and the staple went down. It was this finger right here. And I had to go into the hospital and I had to have stitches in it. There's a scar right there, in fact, still there from it. So anyway . . .

DC: That sounds painful. It does. What was your Mother doing at this point in time?

NB: She wasn't working. She was just home.

DC: Home, yeah?

NB: Uh-huh.

DC: Did she have a network of friends or was she . . .

NB: Yes, she did. And she—well, she did sell Avon for a little while. And she used to baby-sit a few times, you know, but nothing extensive. Just taking care of the house and, you know, that kind of thing. And my Dad, of course, working, you know, at Truck and Coach.

DC: Did you talk to him at all about your efforts to unionize Division Printing?

NB: Oh yes. Yes, he thought it was a good idea, of course. You know. I mean, you know, a lot of people aren't union people. But I am all the way. I mean, I *know*, I know from the good—from the good—it wasn't the goodness of General Motors' hearts why we got raises and what we did. It was the UAW that got it for us. I mean, you know, we wouldn't—we wouldn't have got what we have today if it wasn't for the union.

DC: Yeah, they hadn't been any too generous before then.

NB: No, so . . .

DC: So thinking about your unitizing job again, uh, was it mostly women on that job or were there men and women doing that work?

NB: There were a few guys working in there. Yeah, they'd be our setup guys and stuff like that. But what got me—the day I got hired and everything and I went in to the office first, and then they brought me into the plant. And I mean, I am just overwhelmed. I mean, you know, we went right into a stock room and I mean, there was stock way up to the ceiling. And I mean, I'm just looking—at first I thought, “Oh my gosh, what did I get myself in for?” [laughs] You know, because I mean, you know, you just seen racks clear up to the ceiling, of stock, you know?

DC: It was a pretty tall building?

NB: Yeah, it was pretty tall. Yeah.

DC: Had you ever been to your Father's place of work?

NB: Um, no, I don't believe so.

DC: Never did, OK.

NB: I don't think so. Maybe one time, but I don't remember it, though.

DC: So this made a big impression on you when you walked in.

NB: It did. I mean, I was just—really went from the office right into the plant itself and I mean, you know, all this stock and everything. And I was nervous. I was, you know—I didn't know what was going to happen and everything. But then we got to the unit room and then I was fine. You know.

DC: OK. How big was the unit room?

NB: It was quite large. Quite large. A lot of machines, you know, that pack stuff. You'd put it together and the machines would pack it up.

DC: And then would it go to an assembly line somewhere, or where would it go?

NB: Just the machines. Just the machines. Once they printed—once they printed, you know, the part—see, what you would do is each screw, nut, and bolt and everything had a different part number on it. So, you know, you worked from that on your machine to build up a kit, which, after the kit was built and packaged, that became another part number.

DC: OK.

NB: OK.

DC: And then where would that—where would that larger package go?

NB: That would go to different stock rooms, you know, to be picked and everything. Yeah.

DC: So it would eventually go to—would it eventually go to an assembly plant or would it eventually go to . . .

NB: Our plant. Our plant.

DC: OK, yeah. OK. So they'd just be all kind of unit packed there for each car that came down the line.

NB: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

DC: OK, I see. Yeah.

NB: And I mean, you know, some machines would do little packets. We called them—the screws and nuts and bolts that went into these packages—we called them peanuts. That's what we called them. And, you know, it would take maybe ten different part numbers to create one part number once the package was all put together. And it would drop down, you'd put the parts in there, and it would seal it up. Yeah. And then that would take off and go to—either it would belong to another kit or the kit was finished. OK.

DC: Yeah. How long did it take to learn how to do all that?

NB: Not long. Not long at all.

DC: OK. Who taught you?

NB: Just our group leaders, you know, and stuff like that. The people that are already working there. I mean, you know, we had—we had excellent training and stuff—so, you know, but I just couldn't get over setting there waiting for stock because I felt like I should get down there and get the stock myself, put it up in my, you know, my little area here and, you know, start working. But they said, "No, don't."

DC: How often would you have to wait?

NB: Well, it just depended on how many pieces had to go in that particular kit, you know. Sometimes we'd be down a half an hour or so. And I mean, I'm setting there and I says, "Now are you sure?" [laughs] "You sure this is OK?" "Yeah, it's all right."

DC: Was there a foreman around or anything?

- NB: Oh yeah. He knew what was going on. I mean, you know, once you run out of parts—if you run out of parts, you know, he'd never say anything.
- DC: As long as you kept up with what you were supposed to do?
- NB: Yeah. It just—I mean, our parts division wasn't like—oh how would you say—you know, like you're in a plant building cars and stuff. It wasn't production. Our plant wasn't production. So, you know, of course we hurried to try to—you know, the group leader tried to hurry to stock us and, you know, so it was great.
- DC: Did you work hard when you were working?
- NB: Not as hard as I did at the printing company.
- DC: Yeah. Yeah.
- NB: Not as hard, but I mean, I—you know, I'd give them a fair day's work because I was so proud of getting that job. I mean, you know. So I knew once I got older, you know, that I would, you know, I would get a pension from General Motors. And that's what I wanted.
- DC: Did you get any benefits of any sort at Division Printing?
- NB: Uh-uh.
- DC: No? OK.
- NB: Uh-uh.
- DC: So no pension. Any health benefits?
- NB: No, you'd have to work ten years there, see. So, you know, I only had around seven, so—but that didn't—that didn't bother me. I was glad to get out of there.
- DC: Yeah, when you're in your twenties you don't think of knee replacements or anything like that.
- NB: [laughs]
- DC: Were there other new workers in your department—unitizing?
- NB: Yeah, they kept coming in through the years. They kept coming through. And then when I got—let's see, in 1976, they had, let's see, this department that was going to move to Pontiac Parts. That's the one, where am I now? [finding her directional bearings inside the union hall] That's—this is the back—over this way. Columbia and Joslyn.
- DC: Columbia and Joslyn, OK.

NB: Yes. They had a company called Mr. Goodwrench—target program—that was going to go over and leave the parts division there on Williams Lake Road. And they needed about twenty-five people to go with that job and you took your seniority with you. OK. And I thought to myself, you know, and all my girlfriends there—well, we thought, we're low seniority and everything, so we talked about it and we decided to go. Because, you know one thing that I didn't like about the parts division there on Williams Lake Road was the prime paint. And I had to work in there for awhile. And it—I mean, it was very heavy work. Very hot work. Some of the—some of the parts that would come out of the furnace were so hot. So that was another reason why, you know, they didn't have that at this parts warehouse over here.

DC: Did you do that on a regular basis?

NB: Yeah, I did it close to maybe—I worked there about four or five months till my—I started getting cysts on my hands because of the parts were so heavy. And I had to wear, you know, these laced up things, you know, for my hands on both of them.

DC: You said prime paint. Were there paint fumes, as well, or was it mostly the oven?

NB: Mostly the oven, and of course they were dipped, these sheet metal pieces. Hoods, quarter panels, I mean, you know, that was really hard work.

DC: Big parts, yeah.

NB: Oh, they were big parts. And then, of course, you'd—you'd take them right off of the line when they came from the furnace, pick them up and throw them on this big huge piece of cardboard. And the cardboard was really thick. And then you'd have to bend the cardboard around the part like this. And then this strap would come around it, you know. And so, you know, that was pretty hard. Because I was just a little gal then.

DC: Did you have to lift those yourself or did you have help?

NB: Sometimes we had help. Sometimes. I was taking off radiator supports by myself.

DC: How much did they weigh?

NB: Oh, that was—that was about forty-five pounds. That was heavy for me, because I was just a little girl then, you know. I was small. But anyway, we just decided that we liked—we heard about the Goodwrench program—target—you know, that was going. And we just decided, "Well you know, what the heck? We're low seniority at Drayton at Williams Lake Road and we're going to be low seniority at Pontiac." So we thought, "Well, we're going to take it." So we were laid off a couple of months and we got paid, you know, for that. And then we went into Pontiac Parts Division over here.

DC: And what did you think of that?

NB: Well, we started—we got in there that night and we started working and picking stock for the dealerships. That's what target program was about. And the people, the guys, were so glad to see us. They were so nice to us. You know, I mean, we didn't have any trouble with anybody. Everybody was so nice. And we did really good. And I think we were—we were brought in in March of 1976 and like August, September of 1976, they started hiring like crazy. And most of us got to go on days because of our seniority. So we went on days and I worked there in target for about ten years.

DC: When you were on the unitizing job, what shift were you working?

NB: You mean at Drayton?

DC: Yeah. Well, I was thinking . . .

NB: Nights.

DC: Nights, OK, yeah. Before you made the switch over to Pontiac.

NB: Let's see, was it nights? Um . . .

DC: When you first hired in at General Motors.

NB: Oh, OK. Let me think. I think it was nights. Yeah, it was nights. Yeah. Mm hmm.

DC: What did you think of working nights?

NB: Uh-uh.

DC: Didn't like it?

NB: No, I didn't like it. I was never really a night person. I'd rather get up at like two o'clock in the morning and go to work, you know, and so I know—I knew I would have to put up with that until I got more seniority and everything. But once I got to Pontiac, I only worked like six months on nights. And I put in for days and I stayed on days.

DC: But you worked nights for nearly seven years, it sounds like.

NB: Well pretty much. Yeah, pretty much. And I, you know, I just had to make adjustments, you know, because I wanted that job so bad. And then I got used to it, but I'd rather have worked days.

DC: Was your Dad still working nights or did he switch . . .

NB: No, he always was a night man. Always.

DC: Always was, wow.

NB: Yes. Yeah.

DC: Wow, all the way through. Because at some point, he could have switched, I'm sure.

NB: Yes, he didn't want to. He didn't want to. He was just—and I was just the opposite. I wanted days and he wanted nights.

DC: Why do you suppose he wanted the night shift?

NB: I just thought that, you know, it was easier for him. Because you know, he would do all his stuff that he had to do through the day. You know, Dad drove and so he needed to go get the groceries for, you know, our family, and do the yard work, and the painting, or whatever had to be done. And then he'd go on into work. And it worked good for him. That's what he liked.

DC: But it wasn't yours—your preference anyway.

NB: Right. [laughs]

DC: Did you ever have any need to use the union at all in either of these jobs?

NB: Oh yes [sighing heavily]. Oh yes.

DC: Tell me about some of those instances.

NB: Well, I don't know if I should say this . . .

End of Side A

Begin Side B

NB: Yeah. And he was a union guy. But he'd give me a terrible hard time.

DC: How so?

NB: Oh, he, uh—I mean, I was just a young girl, you know, lady. And I had—I had just newly got married. I didn't—I didn't get married till I was about twenty-seven, twenty-eight years old. And . . .

DC: So right around the time, or just after you took the job at . . .

NB: Yes. He started after me.

DC: OK. He was a union guy.

- NB: Yes, he was. And I—I mean, you know, I'd never give him any reason to do this. I was a pretty shy, you know, young lady. And—I mean, a couple times he tried to run me over with a forklift truck.
- DC: Was that because you weren't responding to his advances?
- NB: I suppose so. I would go into the cafeteria and he would—this is the truth, now—he would hoot at me and howl at me. I mean, I just—and then finally he started calling my home.
- DC: Were you still living at your parents' house?
- NB: No, no. I was married. I just had gotten married and everything. And he knew exactly when my husband left for work. I mean, I was—I was getting really scared. I really was getting scared.
- DC: Was he a representative of the union or was he . . .
- NB: No. No, just a worker. Yeah. And . . .
- DC: Had there been any other instances along those lines of male workers responding that way to you?
- NB: No, I never, I never—I had a couple hit me across the butt, you know, a few times, you know, with a paper. And I would always turn around and say, "If you do that again," you know, "I'm not liking that." Just because I work in the plant, that doesn't make me less a lady, you know.
- DC: Yeah. And what would they . . .
- NB: Well, they would come back and they would apologize to me and respect me for that, you know. But this one guy, I mean—I had to go nights for inventory one time, over at Drayton. OK. And I thought, "Well, this'll be good. I'm going to get away from this guy." And I'm sitting in the cafeteria and, I mean—I had a little bit of time on days before I left to go to Pontiac here. But I had to go on nights because I didn't have much seniority. This was just for inventory. And I was sitting there and who walks in? He does. I thought, "Oh my gosh." Here I'm going to be walking out to the car at night by myself, you know. So there was a guy that worked in the unit room with me. His name was Stan. And he was a big, big muscular guy. And I told Stan what was going on and I says, "Will you please make sure that I get out to my car at night safely?" Because I told him what was going on. And so he did. But I mean, I was—I was very nervous about this—this guy. And so finally, I got a hold of the union and they were going—they brought security in and talked to me and I guess he found out, so a lot of it stopped. Because see, he didn't want to get caught. See, he'd come in to work before I did and . . .
- DC: In the day or seniority-wise or what?

- NB: No, just, I mean because, you know, it was his shift, you know. His shift started a little bit earlier than mine. And I was really getting scared about this guy.
- DC: Sure. You said like when you went in the lunch room or whatever he would hoot and holler and all that. Well, how did other people respond to him when he would do that?
- NB: Well, a lot of my friends, you know, they just—they just thought this was just really getting bad, you know?
- DC: Would anyone confront him?
- NB: Um [short pause] no, not really. What they did try to do was get a petition against him for me.
- DC: Was that the union or your friends?
- NB: No, my friends.
- DC: Your friends. Would these be girlfriends or male friends?
- NB: Yes, lady friends. I mean, he would leave nasty things at my work thing. I mean, like I said, I was young and naïve. Even at twenty-seven years old, I mean, you know, I was still shy and I mean, he would leave things on my work area that, I mean, I didn't know what he was even talking about. That's how bad it was sometimes [laughs]. Anyway, you know, I—somebody must have told him that I was talking to security, so it stopped.
- DC: Did any of your girlfriends in the plant experience anything like this?
- NB: No, not that I know of. Not that I know of. He was just kind of after me, I guess.
- DC: Were there ever any supervisors who did anything like that?
- NB: Oh, my supervisor said, well because every time I'd have a note or something from him, I'd go to my supervisor. And he said one time, he said, "Well, I heard that he tried to date you and everything and you wouldn't have anything to do with him." And that really upset me because that wasn't true. I mean, this guy was married.
- DC: Oh, really? OK.
- NB: Yes, and I was married, too. I didn't want any part of him. I never give him a hard time. I don't know why—he just did this. I just—I have no clue.
- DC: So how long did that go on before the union finally got involved with security?
- NB: It must have went on for maybe six months or so. And I had even—my nerves were so bad, I even went out on sick leave. And he was calling me, you know, while I was on sick leave. And, I mean, I knew it was him. I just knew it. I just, you know—from the

different things that had happened, you know? And, but anyway, that episode, it finally started ending and then, of course, I went over to Pontiac here.

DC: Where did you meet your husband?

NB: At Division Printing, the printing company.

DC: OK.

NB: Yeah. I met him there.

DC: Did he stay on there at Division Printing?

NB: No, he finally got a job over at Fisher Body.

DC: Oh, OK.

NB: Uh-huh. Was it Fisher Body? [short pause] Yes, it was. It was Fisher Body.

DC: Was that before or after you . . .

NB: No, he was working, he just started working there, you know.

DC: What was his job at Fisher Body?

NB: Oh, my goodness. See, I'm really not quite sure.

DC: Yeah.

NB: You know, he was just on the line, I guess.

DC: Was he eager to leave Division Printing, as well?

NB: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Yes. Uh-huh.

DC: OK. So when you—did you get a house before you got married or did you get a house together when you got married?

NB: Yeah, I got a—I rented the house after I got the job at General Motors. It was a small little house and I rented that. And then when we got married, you know, he moved in there with me. And then the people finally was going to put the house up for sale, and so we bought it. And it was—we did a lot of, you know, work on the house. It was real small. But that's all we really needed. You know, that's all.

DC: Yeah. And so you were working at the parts division and he was going out to Fisher Body.

NB: Mm-hmm.

DC: Did you work the same shift or different shifts?

NB: Well, when we first got married I worked nights and he worked days. And then I finally went onto days.

DC: Yeah. But quite a bit later.

NB: Yeah. Uh-huh.

DC: OK. Let's see. You mentioned that the—when I mentioned about the possibility of needing the union, you said, “Oh yeah.” Were there more examples or was it mainly that one example with the guy who was harassing you?

NB: Oh, I had—well, just out of different things, you know, that I would get the union for.

DC: Can you think of anything in particular?

NB: One—one thing in particular was that there really, really was really something hard to fight but I wanted anyway, was—I had had a few back surgeries, OK. In fact, three. And I got put on some restrictions and, you know, the young girls started to coming into the plant and being hired in. And I had one job that I really liked and he took me off of that job and give it to her. Because she's just a young chick, you know? I know how that goes.

DC: When was this?

NB: Oh, my goodness. This was right over here at the Pontiac parts. And, of course, once I went on restrictions I had to get out of the target program, you know, Mr. Goodwrench, and I went back to the unit room again. OK.

DC: Ok. Back to the other plant or still at . . .

NB: No, still . . .

DC: They had a unit room at Pontiac parts?

NB: Yeah. Still at Pontiac. I stayed there till I retired.

DC: OK.

NB: OK? And so I had a lot of restrictions and GM really give me a hard time with that. They would try to take me off of my easy job and give me a harder one. And what they did was they took me off of my job and give her that job, and give me a harder one, which I wasn't supposed to be doing. So I get a hold of, you know, the committeeman.

DC: And how did that work out?

- NB: It worked out. In fact, I got him on discrimination. I mean, I had just—I'd just had it. Because I mean, I went through a lot of pain and agony with my back, OK.
- DC: What happened to your back?
- NB: Well, I—let's see, June of, let's see, '94—no, of '84. I was still working in the target program and everything and I started—I started really having some trouble. I was lifting seventy-pound boxes and I mean, I was just really thin still. Young girl. Young lady. And I was—I was lifting these boxes and I started—I started noticing the pain in my back, lower. And it started going down by my sciatic nerve, down the side of my leg, all the way down to my ankle. And that was June of '84. And I kept—I kept lifting these boxes. And I thought, you know, I mean, I'm—I'm strong. I've pushed wagons up to ten thousand pounds. You know, I've done that. I'm a strong girl. It'll go away. And so I just kept lifting and lifting and it kept getting worse. And finally, July of '95, I just, I couldn't take it anymore. I wasn't sleeping at night and I was still lifting that weight. And I kept getting cramps in my legs and the cramps wouldn't go away. In my calves, you know? And I started dragging my left leg bad. And so—I was divorced at the time, so my Mom and Dad took me in to the hospital. Because I mean, I was just in agony. I just could not take it anymore.
- DC: Now was this '85 or '95?
- NB: This was '85, yeah, '85. And so they started running a bunch of tests on me and everything and I had a ruptured disc. And I went through a series of physical therapy and went through traction and after all of that, I tried to get down out of my bed in the hospital and the pain was just excruciating. So my doctor, he finally come in and he said, "Well, we've tried everything we can. It's time for surgery now." And I mean, I was scared, you know. You think about, oh they're going to mess with your back, you know. So I said, "Let's do it." I said, "Let's do it." So I had my surgery in July of '85 and the next morning I was up. I took a shower, washed my hair. You know? I mean, I was humped over, but I mean the pain kind of was over with. The only thing I had to deal with was pain from the surgery itself, you know? So I—you know, I was doing pretty good and Mom and Dad came after me and took me home. I wasn't supposed to drive and I didn't. And I went back to the doctor two weeks after that and I told the doctor, I says, "You know, I've got pain in that leg again." So he checked my back out and he said, "Well, you know"—I still don't know to this day what it meant, but he said, "Your back is spasmodic." And he said, "Nora, I think you're going to have to go back in the hospital again. I think another disc is ruptured." Well, it did. It did. And about three weeks after the first surgery, I was under the knife again having another one. So I was off, I was off six months for those two back surgeries. And then I went back to work with, you know, the restrictions and everything. Yeah. But that discrimination, I finally got him for discrimination. I just—and I had had trouble with this foreman before.
- DC: What kind of trouble?
- NB: Just, I mean, you know—and I would always, always be strong and fight back even though I was shy. You know, we were doing inventory and I was working and at the time, you

know, we could smoke in the plant with no problem, you know. And I was down in one of the stock rooms, working and counting stock and everything. And there were a whole bunch of people a couple aisles over—and you know, they were kind of working and laughing and joking and stuff like that. But I was in this aisle by myself and I had come down and I just lit a cigarette, you know, and he come down and he says, “I don’t want you doing that. I want you working.” And the other—there were some more people when he did that, was in the same aisle with me. And he really embarrassed me something terrible. And he never said anything to the people that were over there joking. So, you know, he just was just on my case. And I mean, I had—I had—I had been working. So, you know, I pulled him off to the side and I said, “I’m going to tell you what.” I said, “I was working.” And I says, “Furthermore, if you got something to say to me, you take me off to the side. Don’t you humiliate me in front of other people because I just don’t like that.”

DC: And what did he say?

NB: Well, he just got really upset and his face got red and he got on the cart and he took off. But anyway, this discrimination suit, I won that. And he got himself in some problems with that.

DC: Yeah, what finally happened when the ruling came down?

NB: Well, what had happened was they brought some people in from the union here. And they got some other people off to the side and asked them questions. Asked if, ‘do you think that he was really discriminating against me and treating me badly?’ And they said yes. So I won that case. Made him madder than a hatter, but *I won that*. Because I deserved to win that. He had no right, you know, to take this little shapely chick, you know, and give her my job when I had more seniority and I was supposed to be on that job because of my back.

DC: Yeah.

NB: But I won that and I was really thrilled over that one. Yeah.

DC: Was there any other—any financial gain for you in that, or was it just a matter of getting your job back?

NB: No. Just getting—I mean, I got the job back anyway. But I wanted to prove that he was discriminating against me, you know.

DC: Did you have a full-fledged hearing of any sort?

NB: Well, yeah, with the union coming into the plant.

DC: Oh, when they came in the plant.

NB: Oh yes. I mean, you know, I wanted to go all the way. I wanted to win that because I just got fed up with that.

DC: So was it your sense that the union was pretty responsive, then, to your . . .

NB: Absolutely. Absolutely yes. Uh-huh. And then they took me off of my job another time and told me to go and work in another part of unitizing. But it wasn't an easy job. And I ruptured a disc in my neck then. See, what you have to do, you have to work the job until your union man comes along. See, that's how it goes. And I worked it maybe an hour and everything and another disc ruptured in my neck. So I had two lower discs in my back and one in my neck.

DC: Wow. You've had your share of ailments.

NB: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Do you think the neck one—was it related to the job you were doing?

NB: Yes. Yes.

DC: Yeah. What was the—you said it wasn't an easy job. What was it?

NB: Well, what it was, was slamming these big cartons into a staple machine. And, you know, you had to slam it in hard like that and, you know, like this.

DC: Your neck kind of whiplashes back.

NB: Yeah. And I mean, it—see, my back—I think once, once I heard through the doctor, once you've had disc problems and everything, your back becomes weakened. And, you know, another disc could rupture at any time. And I think that's just exactly what happened. And I had to—see, I think, the scar. See, you can see it right there. They have to go through here to get to the [disc]—yeah. So I was off about three or four months with that one.

DC: Was it still your dream job even after all this? You had waited so long.

NB: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah, I would have—I would have never wanted to quit working there. Yeah.

DC: With the exception of this one maniac who harassed you, how did you get along with your fellow workers?

NB: I did—I got along good. I got along really good with them.

DC: Yeah.

NB: Mm-hmm.

DC: What kinds of things would you do to pass the time during the day?

NB: Well, you know, we would talk and work and—I mean, since we weren't a production plant, you know, we had to work and everything but, you know—and we had breaks and the thing that I got into—I don't know how it got started—but you know when somebody would retire and everything, we'd go in and pitch in and have a big dinner. And I was in charge of that. OK. And I was in charge of the big Christmas dinners that we had. And my foremens would give me the whole day off, you know, of the day of the dinner to do all of that.

DC: So you had some organizing talent here.

NB: So, yes, I did it a long—many years. Many years I'd do that. Just mainly for our big department, you know, not the others in the plant but our big department. You know what I mean—we had a lot of people working in that department. So everybody—you know, I'd go around and ask the people what they'd like to bring and make sure that we didn't have ten or twelve of this and that, you know, that we would have plenty of everything. And then people would bring it in and they would put it on big carts to be taken to the room for setup.

DC: So you'd eat at the plant then?

NB: Mm-hmm.

DC: Yeah, OK.

NB: Mm-hmm. It would be at the plant. We'd have a big room, you know. We'd have to set up the tables and get the food up there and get it all set up. We would set up all the goodies and sweets first, you know, for the first break. And then by lunch we'd have all the other stuff set up. And I mean, this would be a whole all-day thing. I mean, you know, I didn't have time to do my job.

DC: Of course not. That's a big production.

NB: It was. It was. So I mean, I did that for a lot of years. But I enjoyed it.

DC: I'm sure everyone appreciated that.

NB: They did. Now they don't even do it. They said that after I left in our department, they don't even do it anymore.

DC: So no one was able to step up to the challenge.

NB: I guess not. Nobody wanted the challenge, I guess. [laughs]

DC: What kinds of things did you like to do outside of work?

NB: I didn't have much time, really. You know, I mean, I was married and I was taking care of my house, you know, and grocery shopping and laundry and I mean, that kept me busy.

But we traveled and everything a little bit. We used to go up to Black Lake. I enjoyed that. So, you know—but we would travel and have vacation time.

DC: Where else would you go?

NB: Oh, let's see. We'd go down to Florida, you know, and I know one time we went with a couple—we went to Puerto Rico. So that was really, really nice. And we'd go up to Black Lake, you know, with some friends and maybe camp a little bit. So, I mean, when we worked and everything, we didn't get out too much. We had—we did have an old car. We had a '55 Chevy. So a lot of times we'd go to the drag strip and we'd race that. So that was pretty neat.

DC: Yeah. Did you ever race it?

NB: My husband did. Not me, not me.

DC: All right.

NB: Always kept it clean and polished it and, you know, sometimes—they used to have a car show down at the Pontiac Mall, the Summit Place Mall, right before school started and everything. They'd have a hot rod show. So we'd always put the car into that and, you know, I always enjoyed that. I modeled, kind of, in front of it and everything. So that was always fun. So we were always into that. Yeah.

DC: Did you have any other cars like that that you would show, or just the one?

NB: No, just the one. The '55 Chevy. Yeah. It had, you know—it had a fiberglass front end, you know, that would tilt. You know, it was a nice car. It really was. And I enjoyed that. So, yeah.

DC: I'm trying to think back—see if I can dig into your memories any more about growing up. Your experiences are really interesting for a number of reasons and one is that you're younger than a lot of people I've talked with, you know?

NB: Ohh, OK.

DC: And so, you know, starting work in the '60s, it's a new angle and all. It's pretty neat.

NB: [laughs] Oh, good.

DC: I'm trying to see if maybe I can dig any more memories out of you about what it was like being a young teenager and then a teenager in the '50s. You know, a lot of people that I've talked to were the parents of teenagers in the '50s and so I'm kind of trying to see if you can remember a little bit about . . .

- NB: Oh my goodness, yes. I can remember things like coming home and couldn't wait to get home to watch American Bandstand. I mean, that was my show. And I mean, I had to come home from school and watch that. That was the number one must.
- DC: Was that pretty common for the kids your age to want to come back and see American Bandstand?
- NB: Oh, yeah. Dick Clark and—yeah, I remember going to the State Fair in Detroit, and Dick Clark was there.
- DC: He came to the State Fair?
- NB: Oh, yes, he came. And I mean, different—like Ricky Nelson and I mean, oh I just—I was in love with Ricky Nelson at that time. He was my just all-time favorite. And what was so funny, one of my older aunts had come up from Kentucky. And my Mom and Dad was taking her to the State Fair with me where I could see Ricky Nelson and Dick Clark. OK? And I mean, I got out in line early and she said, “Well, I'm going to go in there with you.” So my Mom and my auntie went in there with me. Well I got—I must've been about three rows back from the main stage. And I mean, when Dick Clark and Ricky Nelson came out, the people went—the girls went nuts. And here my Mom and my aunt are setting in to this maze of young teenagers going nuts. [laughs] But I mean, I was just—oh, I just loved Ricky Nelson at that time, and Dick Clark and I mean, you know, that did bring a lot of memories back. Yeah.
- DC: Sure. That was a big event, yeah.
- NB: And I liked the Beatles. When they came out, they were just my awesome group. I mean, they were going to go—they were coming to Detroit to Olympia and I couldn't find anybody to go with me. I think I was about nineteen years old. So I just decided, you know, that I was going to get on the bus and I was going to go down to Detroit and I went by myself. And I was nervous, you know, I mean—you know, my folks were very nervous for me. But I managed to do fine and got to see the Beatles. And I mean, it was—that was an awesome thing back then, to see the Beatles. Because when they came out on stage, I mean, the flash cubes went and you couldn't see anything. I mean, the whole Olympia just lit up, you know, with flashbulbs. And then you couldn't hear them sing because of the girls screaming. [laughs]
- DC: [laughs] Oh, man.
- NB: Yeah. That was just really neat. Just to see the Beatles in person. And I mean, I didn't have a close seat at that time. You know, I was kind of . . .
- DC: It's a big arena, yeah.
- NB: Yeah. I was kind of far away to the right of them and over in there. But I mean, that was really awesome. That was, that was good.

DC: Yeah. So if you rushed home to see American Bandstand, that means that you had a TV at home, anyway.

NB: Yeah.

DC: Did you—do you remember getting the first TV or was it . . .

NB: Oh, I remember that, too. I remember that, too.

DC: Yeah? How old were you then, do you remember?

NB: Oh, I mean, I was—oh, I'm not really sure. Maybe five, six, seven years old. And you know, it was just a black-and-white TV and I can remember one show in particular they had was women wrestlers and men wrestlers. And I don't remember much of anything else. There wasn't a whole lot of shows, you know, that they had back then. But I remember that first television. Yeah.

DC: Yeah. It was a big deal. You would've got one pretty early on, then, it sounds like.

NB: Yeah. Uh-huh. Of course I don't remember how much they cost, you know, because my Dad didn't make a whole lot of money. But back then that was a whole lot of money.

DC: You said before you thought you lived pretty comfortably.

NB: We did. We did. I mean, you know—and my Dad would go—if he had like maybe two or three dollars from his paycheck, he'd go put it in the bank. You know, left over. He would go put it in the bank.

DC: You said that he did a lot of the shopping, as well, though, right? Because your Mother didn't drive.

NB: Yes. Right. Yeah, she'd make out the list and he'd go. So we had a car. Oh, you know, one, I don't know, old car. I remember, I think it was black. I think it was a Hudson, in fact. You remember that?

DC: By name. But I think they were mostly off the roads before I was aware. Yeah.

NB: Yeah.

DC: What about—did your Mom do any canning or any of that kind of stuff?

NB: Oh yeah.

DC: Yeah?

NB: Oh yeah, she did that. I can remember as a child, too. You know, I mean, I was young. She'd take a tin can, open it, and put it in a pan and stomp on it. You know? Because they

were saving, you know, for I guess the war thing. And I mean, I was young. But I couldn't imagine why she was in the kitchen stomping on those cans, you know?

DC: Did she put up some of her own vegetables and fruits and stuff, as well?

NB: Well, I think she'd get them at the store, because we still lived in the apartment and everything. But she did do a bit of canning. And I can remember, too, they used to—you could get a whole chicken in a can.

DC: Hmm, in a can. OK.

NB: In a can. Yeah. And I mean, it was good and that's what we had for Sunday dinner, though. But I mean, it was good. Yeah.

DC: Did you have a refrigerator?

NB: It was like an ice chest at that time. Then they got a refrigerator.

DC: Do you have any idea when that transition was?

NB: I don't remember. I don't really remember that.

DC: But you—as a kid, you remember the ice box.

NB: Yeah, I do. Because I can remember as a kid when the ice man would come along, you know, and deliver the ice. And the kids would take, you know, maybe—maybe when they went to pick up the ice, a piece of ice would come off and we'd go and we'd eat it. You know, so . . . [laughs]

DC: A little shaving of ice—simple pleasures.

NB: Yeah. I mean, it was. Yeah. And I can remember, too, as kids we'd have a rain. As long as it wasn't thundering, we'd go out and we'd play around in the rain. You know, that was always fun to do.

DC: Mm-hm. Were there other neighborhood games, as well? What kinds of neighborhood games?

NB: Just maybe stuff like hopscotch and maybe jacks. Oh yeah. Yeah. But I mean, you know, kids today—you know, we—the only thing like what we got at Christmas was maybe a doll and maybe a tea set or a sled or a baby buggy, you know. We didn't have those things like children have today. But I've still got my last doll I got when I was twelve years old.

DC: You still have it.

NB: I still have it. It was the first walking doll.

- DC: Hmm. It walked on its own?
- NB: Yeah, you'd take it—you know, you'd go . . .
- DC: It had bendable legs?
- NB: But her legs would move. Mm-hmm. I still got that doll. Mm-hmm. And she's beautiful. I mean, you know, beautiful.
- DC: With the kids you hung out with, did a lot of their Dads and/or Moms work in the plants?
- NB: I suppose they did.
- DC: Not really sure though?
- NB: But I'm not sure. It was so young. We didn't, you know—we never talked too much about what the Moms and Dads did as far as jobs goes, you know? So I don't know about that. Yeah.
- DC: That sounds pretty common. I think that would be the case for my neighborhood growing up as well. You know, the Moms and Dads are . . .
- NB: Yeah, they're working and you know, you don't know what they do, but . . .
- DC: Yeah. But I guess I'm just wondering if—you already answered that you don't really remember, but I wondered if in your neighborhood if a lot of the kids were from union families or if there was a sprinkling of people doing all kinds of different things.
- NB: I don't really know. But I know that my uncles on my Mother's side—my uncles lived and were born around here, too. My older—one of my older uncles, he was born in Kentucky. But anyway, they worked for GM, too. They worked for GM. Yeah.
- DC: OK. So that seemed to be a pipeline, then, coming from . . .
- NB: It was. I mean, you know, when you were born down into a Southern state, you know, a small town. You knew that you couldn't make a living down there. You'd go to where you *could* make a living. And so most of them, they all came up here and they worked for the plants and everything. GM. Yeah.
- DC: Can you think of—well, actually, I have another question. In your neighborhood growing up, were there different nationalities or different races in your neighborhood?
- NB: Hmm. [short pause] I don't really remember that, either. But back then, you know—and, you know, it's changed now, which that's good—but you know, for the blacks, they used to live, you know, in a different area. But it's changed and I mean, I had quite a few black people, friends and everything at General Motors. Close friends. So, you know, I don't

really remember, you know—as a child you don't see people as different races. You know, you just don't. But I knew that I never grew up around them. You know?

DC: So it sounds like you didn't necessarily have black friends growing up but once you entered the plant . . .

NB: Yeah. Yeah. You know, I had all kinds of black friends in the plant. You know, really close friends. Really nice people. You know. But I mean, as a child you just—you never notice that. And I mean, that was kind of the starting of segregation and stuff, you know. Or, integration! You know, and—but I don't remember living around the black people. And never—I was so young, I never even asked why. I didn't know. You know. [laughs] I didn't know. But yeah, I made a lot of terrific friends. Black people, they were nice and close and I mean, you know, we partied together. Yeah.

DC: Can you think of questions that you thought I was going to ask you, or that I should have asked you, that I haven't asked you?

NB: No, I think you've covered a lot, you know?

DC: It's been really interesting.

NB: Yeah, it has, because it's made me think about all the stuff that's happened through my life and everything. You know, you're really—you're *good*. [laughs]

DC: Well, thanks.

NB: You are! Because I mean, it's a lot of stuff, I've never thought about in years and years and years, you know?

DC: Well I never know what direction any particular interview will take, and like I said, I have a lot of questions here that I don't necessarily ask in any order. But I just—just kind of get a feel for what question should come next based on the . . .

NB: So I may be one of the youngest ones you've interviewed?

DC: I've talked to a couple who were born after you in 1945 or so, but it seems like the bulk of the people I've talked with were born in the '20s and '30s.

NB: Oh, OK. So wow, that's quite a . . .

DC: It's a big difference.

NB: Yes, it is.

DC: Yeah. And one of the things I've learned in talking with a number of people who started work, say, in the late '40s or early '50s is that the '50s seemed to be a period of really

unstable employment. And so it's interesting to hear from your vantage point, you know, it looked like your Dad's employment was pretty stable—that things stayed pretty consistent.

NB: Maybe there's a question I can ask you: did you come across any ladies that were hired in at that particular time?

DC: In the '40s and '50s?

NB: Right.

DC: Yeah. A few, yeah.

NB: A few.

DC: Yeah, but not many.

NB: Not many. See, they didn't hire a lot of women at that time. And you know, when I was trying to find a job at GM, they weren't hiring a lot of women at that time. You know, just—not like the men. But boy, when the parts division started hiring and everything and they were women, too, that's when, you know—that's when I finally succeeded.

DC: Had those jobs historically been open for women?

NB: Not that I know of.

DC: OK, yeah.

NB: I mean, there were a few women still working there, but—you know, when I came into the plant—but not a whole lot. And then they really started hiring them.

DC: It's really interesting because I've talked to a number of men who dreamed of working in one of the plants because their father had or uncles had or grandfathers had.

NB: Right.

DC: And here's a case where that was *your* dream.

NB: Yes.

DC: And something that you really wanted to.

NB: Yes.

DC: And it looks like there weren't as many opportunities, in part because you were a woman and maybe the timing was off a little bit in terms of hiring, as well, but for the large part it was because you were a woman.

- NB: I just was bound and determined that I was going to get me a job that would create and help a living for me when I retired. I wanted that, and I—because I had seen my Dad, you know—my Dad worked I think thirty-four years at Truck and Coach and retired and was able to live quite a few years after he retired, you know, and everything. But my husband, he wanted me to quit. I said, “I’m not giving up that job.” I would not—I would not give up that job. He asked me to give it up. I said, “I’m not giving that job up.”
- DC: OK. Why did he want you to give it up?
- NB: I think he just wanted me to be at home. I said, “I’m not giving that job up. I worked too long to get it.” I said, “Nope. No way.”
- DC: That’s a big difference between you and your Mom, though, because she seemed to want to be at home.
- NB: Yes, well I never had children. OK. Never had children. So, you know, I just would not give up that job. I says, “I’m going to work and I’m going to . . .” And then in ’93—let’s see, no, in December of ’92—they came up, the UAW came up with—and GM came up with—the window retirement. And I mean, I had just—in December I had just turned fifty. And I wasn’t married. OK. And I thought, “Oh, I don’t know.” And I said, “No, I think . . .” My thirty years would’ve been in ‘99. OK. 1999. And I says, “Oh, I don’t know what to do.” You know, and I talked to my Mom and Dad. And my Dad says, “You know what? You’ve worked a lot of years.” You know, “besides working at GM and then,” you know, “you worked at Division Printing and you’ve had three back operations.” And my Dad says, “You know, I think it’s time for you to quit.” You know, retire. And you know, I thought about it and I thought, “Well, you know, with this retirement I could get a pension and still go out and get another job and work as much as I wanted to.” So, I thought, well OK. I took it. I took it. And it was a good thing that I did, because six months later, my Mom got really ill and she battled cancer for about two years. And then, after my Mom come down with that, about three months later my Dad did, too.
- DC: Oh, really? I’m sorry.
- NB: So I was taking care of both of them for about two years or so. And then—it was a good thing because I really took good care of them.
- DC: Yeah, but you wouldn’t have been able to devote that time if you were working.
- NB: Right, if I had not took—and I think that retirement was just made for me. I mean, I had no clue that they were going to be sick down the road like that, so soon. But they got both ill and—I mean, I had plenty of time to take care of them, wait on them, take them in to the hospitals for chemotherapy. I worked on their house, got them groceries, got their medicine, plus took care of my house, my yard, their yard. I did all of that.
- DC: That’s a lot of responsibility.

NB: It was, but I was so glad that I was able to do it and plus get my pension. So it worked out, really.

DC: So they both had cancer at the same time.

NB: Yes, they did.

DC: Oh boy.

NB: Yeah. So it was very hard. And I mean, I was very close to them. And it was devastating when I lost my Mom and then my Dad nine months later. So I had to—I did the funerals for both of them, you know, the clothes, the funerals. And I was the executor to the estate, so I had to—my brother was still in Florida—so I had to clean out their whole house. That took me—that took me a year and a half. But, you know, I got me a UAW legal attorney. I didn't have to go through probate or anything.

DC: OK. You got legal services through the union?

NB: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK. That's very helpful.

NB: It was. I mean, it didn't cost me anything. And the only thing it cost me was sort of like to the court fees for all the court paperwork and all of that, which I didn't still have to go to court, but I think it was eight hundred dollars that I had to pay. That was it.

DC: OK. Yeah, it could be a lot worse.

NB: Yeah. Especially if you have to hire an attorney to do that. I mean, very costly. So, anyway.

DC: So did you get involved with the retiree group here right away when you retired?

NB: Uh, yep. Well, I think so. Because it was only like once a month. Once a month, the luncheons and everything. But, you know, I was busy trying to—I just—get everything together for my Mom and Dad.

DC: Right, that happened right away. I understand that.

NB: Yeah. And then I had to go to all these places and get everything situated. I had to sell my Dad's car and then, you know, pick out the things that I wanted to keep within the house. I mean, I had to go through everything. And I did it all by myself. But I still tried to come to the luncheons. I liked that. Yeah. That was nice. And then I decided to—let's see, how did that work? After I got the estate settled, I decided to go to Florida and spend the winter down in Florida. And I rented a place. And just popped in the car and drove all the way to Florida and spent about six months down there. And I thought, you know, this is really nice. I think, you know, I might decide to just move down. So I kind of started looking for

a place to buy. Because you know, renting is kind of expensive down there. So I found this senior community down there and I bought a new home and packed a lot of stuff from my house up here and then had movers come in and take the stuff down after my house was built. And in '98 I moved into my new house down there. And then about six months later—I moved down in January—and six months later I came back up to Michigan because I was finishing going through a bunch of things that I wanted to get rid of or sell and pack up some more stuff. And then I sold my house up there, up here. And then I moved permanently down there. And come to find out, I hated it.

DC: Oh really?

NB: But I worked a whole year. I mean, I was so lonesome and so bored and, you know, I didn't fit in because I was single.

DC: Oh yeah, right.

NB: You know, and all the married couples stuck together. So I got a job and I worked a year. I worked, well—they don't have too much union down there, but I worked at a non-union plant doing computer chip boards. And I hadn't ever done that before, you know, so that was kind of hard to do. Some of those parts are so small. Tiny, tiny. And you're putting them on a board and it's going down, you know, the line.

DC: It's moving while you're working on it?

NB: Well sometimes, if you have a lot of pieces, and the one across from you—it stops. OK. But that was pretty hard to get used to.

End of Interview